

THE LION'S SHARE

BY OCTAVE THANET
AUTHOR OF "THE MAN OF THE HOUR"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
A. WEIL
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SYNOPSIS.

The story opens at Harvard where Col. Rupert Winter, U. S. A., visiting, saw the suicide of young Mercer. He met Cary Mercer, brother of the dead student. Three years later, in Chicago, in 1906, Col. Winter overheard Cary Mercer apparently planning to kidnap Archie, the colonel's ward, and to gain possession of Aunt Rebecca Winter's millions. A Miss Smith was mentioned apparently as a conspirator. A great financial magnate was aboard the train on which Col. Winter met his Aunt Rebecca, Miss Smith and Archie. Col. Winter learned that the financial magnate is Edwin S. Keatcham. Winter, aided by Archie, cleverly frustrated a hold-up on the train. He took a great liking to Miss Smith, despite her alleged kidnapping plot. Archie mysteriously disappeared in Frisco. Blood in a nearby room at the hotel caused fears for the boy's life. The lad's voice was heard over the telephone, however, and a minute later a woman's voice—that of Miss Smith. Col. Winter and a detective set out for the empty mansion owned by Arnold, a Harvard graduate. They were met with an explosion within. Mercer appeared. He assured Winter that Archie had returned. The colonel saw a vision flitting from the supposedly haunted house. It was Miss Janet Smith. Col. Winter to himself admitted that he loved Miss Smith. Mercer told Winter that Archie had overheard plans for a coup and had been kidnapped. One of Mercer's friends on returning the boy to his aunt had been arrested for speeding and when he returned from the police station to his auto the lad was gone. Mercer confessed he was forcibly detaining Keatcham. Mercer told his life story, relating how Keatcham and his scoundrel secretary, Atkins, had ruined him, the blow killing his wife. Mercer was holding him prisoner in order that he could not get control of a railroad which was the pet project of the father of his college friend, Endicott Tracy. Aunt Rebecca saw Archie in a cab with two men. Then he vanished. She followed in an auto into the Chinese district and by the use of a mysterious Chinese jade ornament she secured a promise from an influential Chinaman that the boy would be returned. Archie returned and told his story. Atkins, former secretary to Keatcham, being his second kidnaper. Col. Winter and Tracy returned to the "haunted house." They found Keatcham, apparently stabbed to death. Keatcham was not dead, however. Cary Mercer appeared on the scene. Winter believing his actions suspicious. The party removed to the Arnold home. They feared Atkins' gang. The colonel became temporary secretary to the magnate. A Black Hand letter was received. The real characteristics of the great financier were revealed. The puzzle of the story fell into place, the blame for the crimes being lifted from Mercer's shoulders and placed upon Atkins. Love of Miss Smith and Col. Winter for each other was plainly seen by other members of the party.

CHAPTER XVII.—Continued.

"No," murmured Miss Smith meekly, with a little twinkle of her eye; "I did that; he hid them. How ridiculous of me to get in such a fright! But you know how Cary hated Mr. Keatcham; and you—no, you don't know the lengths that such a temperament as his will go. I did another silly thing; I found a dagger, one of those Moorish stilettos that hang in the library; it was lying in the doorway. When no one was looking I hid it and carried it off. I stuck it in one of the flower beds; I stuck it in the ferns; I have stuck that wretched thing all over this yard. I didn't dare carry it back and put it in the empty place with the others because some one might have noticed the place. And I didn't dare say anything to Cary; I was right miserable."

"So was I," said the colonel, "thinking you were trying to protect the murderer. But do you know what I had sense to do?"

"Go to Mrs. Winter? Oh, I wanted to!"

"Exactly; and do you know what that dead game sport said to me? She said she found those washed and ironed cuffs and trousers neatly cleaned with milk—what's milk?—and the milk cleaned the spots so much cleaner than the rest that she had her own suspicions started. But says she: 'Not being a plumb idiot, I went straight to Cary and he told me the whole story—'"

"Which was like your story?"

"Very near. And you see it would be like Atkins to leave incriminating testimony round loose. That is, incriminating testimony against Mercer and Tracy. The dagger, Tracy remembers, was not in the library; it was in the patio. Right to hand. Atkins must have got in and found Mr. Keatcham on the floor in a faint. Whether he meant to make a bargain with him or to kill him, perhaps we shall never know; but when he saw him helpless before him he believed his chance was come to kill him and get the cipher key, removing his enemy and making his fortune at a blow, as the French say. Voilà tout!"

"Do you think—her voice sank lower; she glanced over her shoulder—"do you reckon Atkins had anything to do with that train robbery? Was it a mere pretext to give a chance to murder Mr. Keatcham, fixing the blame on ordinary bandits?"

"By Jove! it might be."

"I don't suppose we shall ever know. But, Col. Winter, do you mind explaining to me just what Brother Cary's scheme with Mr. Keatcham was?" Mrs. Winter told me you would."

"She told me," mused the colonel, "that you didn't know anything about this big game which has netted them millions. They've closed out their debts and have the cash. No paper profits for Auntie! She said that she would not risk your being mixed up in it; so kept you absolutely in the dark. I'm there, too. Didn't you know Mercer had kidnapped Archie?"

"No, I didn't know he was with Mr. Keatcham at the hotel. It would have saved me a heap of suffering;

but she didn't dare let me know for fear, if anything should happen, I would be mixed up in it. It was out of kindness, Col. Winter, truly it was. Afterwards when she saw that I was worried she gave me hints that I need not worry, Archie was quite safe."

"And the note-paper?"

"I suppose she gave it to them," answered Miss Smith.

"And the voice I heard in the telephone?" He explained how firmly she had halted the conversation the time Archie would have reassured him. "You weren't there, of course?" said he.

"No, I was downstairs in the ladies' entrance of the court in the hotel; I had come in a little while before, having carried an advertisement to the paper; I wonder why she—maybe it was to communicate with them without risking a letter."

"But how did your voice get into my phone?" he asked.

She looked puzzled only a second, then laughed as he had not heard her laugh in San Francisco—a natural, musical, merry peal, a girlish laugh that made his heart bound.

"Why, of course," said she, "it is so easy! There was a reporter who insisted on interviewing Mrs. Winter about her jewelry; and I was shooting him away. Somehow the wires must have crossed."

"Do you remember—this is very, very pretty, don't you think? Just like a puzzle falling into place. Do you remember coming here on the day Archie was returned?"

"I surely do; my head was swimming, for Mrs. Winter sent me and I began then to suspect. She told me Brother Cary was in danger; of course I wanted to do anything to help him; and I carried a note to him. I didn't go in, merely gave the note and saw him."

"I saw you."

"You? How?"

"Birdsall and I; we were here, in the patio; we, my dear Miss Janet, were the danger! You had on a brown-checked silk dress and you were holding a wire clipper in your hand."

"Yes, sir, I saw it on the grass and picked it up."

She laughed a little; but directly her cheeks reddened. "What must you have thought of me!" she murmured under her breath; and bit the lip that would have quivered.

"I should like to tell you—dear," he answered, "if you will—O Lord, forgive young men for living! If they are not all coming back to ask me to sing! But, Janet, dear, let me say it in Spanish—yes, yes if you really won't be bored; throw me that mandolin."

Aunt Rebecca back in the armchair, faintly smiling, while the old, old words that thousands of lovers have thrilled with pain and hopes and dreams beyond their own power of speech and offered to their sweethearts, rose, winged by the eternal longing:

"Y si te mueve a lastima mi eterno padece,

Como te amo, amame, bellissima mujer!

Como te amo, amame, bellissima mujer!

"And what does it mean in English, Bertie?" said Mrs. Melville.

"Can't you translate it?"

"Shall I?" said the colonel, his voice was careless enough, but not so the eyes which looked up at Janet Smith.

"Not to-night, please," said she. "I—I think Mr. Keatcham is expecting me to read to him a little. Good night. Thank you, Col. Winter."

She was on her feet as she spoke; and Winter did not try to detain her; he had held her hand; and he had felt its shy pressure and caught a fleeting, frightened, very beautiful glance. His dark face paled with the intensity of his emotion. Janet moved away, quietly and lightly, with no break in her composure; but as she passed Mrs. Winter she bent and kissed her. And when Archie would have run after her a delicate jeweled hand was laid on his arm. "Not to-night, laddie; I want you to help me down the steps."

With her hand on the boy's shoulder she came up to Rupert, and inclined her handsome head in Janet's direction. "I think, by rights, that kiss belonged to you, mon enfant," said she.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Casa Fuerte.

Winter would have said that he was too old a man to stay awake all night, when he had a normal temperature; yet he saw the stars come out and the stars fade on that fateful April night. He entered his room at the hour when midnight brushes the pale skirts of dawn and misguided cocks are vociferating their existence to an indifferent world. Before he came there had been a long council with Mercer and his aunt. Mercer, who had been successful in his mission, had barely seen his chief for a moment before a gentle but imperious nurse ordered him away. Winter caught a queer, abrupt laugh from the financier. The latter beckoned to him. "See you are as obedient as I am when your time comes," he chuckled; and he chuckled again when both the soldier and Miss



"I Should Like to Tell You—Dear," He Answered, "If You Will—"

Smith blushed over his awkward jocoseness. Yet, the next moment he extended his hand with his formal, other-generation courtesy and took Miss Janet's shapely, firm fingers in his own lean and nervous grasp. "Allow me to offer you both my sincere congratulations," began he, and halted, his eyes, which seemed so incurious but were so keen, traveling from the woman's confusion to the man's. "I beg your pardon; I understood—Archie who was here, gave me to understand—and I heard you singing; you will hardly believe it, but years ago I sang that to my wife."

"So far as I am concerned, it is settled," said the colonel steadily. Janet lifted her sweet eyes and sent one glance as fleeting and light as the flash of a bird's wing. "I—I reckon it is settled," murmured she; but immediately she was the nurse again. "Mr. Keatcham, you are staying awake much too late. Here is Colvin, who will see to anything you want. Good night."

It was then that Mr. Keatcham had taken the colonel's breath away by kissing Janet's hand; after which he shook hands with the colonel with a strange new cordiality, and watched them both go away together with a look on his gaunt face unlike any known to Colvin.

Only three minutes in the hall, with the moon through the arched window; and his arm about her and the fragrance of her loosened hair against his cheek and her voice stirring his heartstrings with an exquisite pang. Only time for the immemorial questions of love: "Are you sure, dear, it is really I?" and "When did you first—?" To this last she had answered with her half-humorous, adorable little lift of a laugh: "Oh, I reckon it was—a little—all along, ever since I read about your saying that poor little Filipino boy, like Archie; the one who was your servant in Manila, and going hungry for him on the march and jumping into the rapids to save him—when you were lame, too—"

Here the colonel burst in with a groan: "Oh, that monstrous newspaper liar! The 'dear little Filipino boy' was a married man; and I didn't jump into the river to save him. It wasn't more than wading depth—I only swore at him for an idiot and told him to walk out when he tipped over his boat and was floundering about. And he did! He was the limit as a liar—"

To his relief, the most sensible as well as the most lovable woman in the world had burst into a delicious bit of laughter and returned: "Oh, well, you would have jumped in and saved him if the water had been deep; it wasn't your fault it was shallow!" And just at this point Mercer and Aunt Rebecca must needs come with a most unusual premonitory racket, and Janet had fled.

Afterward had come the council. All the coil had been unraveled. Birdsall appeared in person, as sleek, smiling and complacent over his blunders as ever. One of his first

sentences was a declaration of trust in Miss Smith.

"I certainly went off at half-cock there," said he, amiably; "and just because she was so awful nice I felt obliged to suspect her; but I've got the real dog that killed the sheep this time; it's sure the real Red Wolf!" It appeared that he had, of a verity, been usefully busy. He had secured the mechanic who had given Atkins a plan of the secret passages of Casa Fuerte. He had found the policeman who had arrested Tracy (he swore because he was going too fast) and the magistrate who had fined him; and not only that, he had captured the policeman, a genuine officer, not a criminal in disguise, who had been Atkins' instrument in kidnapping Archie. This man, whom Birdsall knew how to terrify completely, had confessed that it was purely by chance that Atkins had seen the boy, left outside in the motor car. Atkins, so he said, had pretended that the boy was a tool of some enemies of Keatcham's, whose secretary he was, trading, not for the only time, on his past position. In reality, Birdsall had come to believe Atkins knew that Keatcham was employing Mercer in his place.

"I can't absolutely put my finger on his information," said Birdsall; "but I suspect Mrs. Melville Winter; I know she was talking to him, for one of my men saw her. The lady meant no harm, but she's one of the kind that is always slandering the detectives and being taken in by the rascals."

He argued that Mrs. Winter and Miss Smith knew where the boy was; for some reason they had let him go and were pretending not to know where he was. "Ain't that so?" the detective appealed to Aunt Rebecca, who merely smiled, saying: "You're a wonder, Mr. Birdsall!" According to Birdsall's theory, Atkins was puzzled by Archie's part in the affair. But he believed could he find the boy's present hosts he would find Edwin Keatcham. It would not be the first time Keatcham had hidden himself, the better to spin his web for the trapping of his rivals. That Mercer was with his employer the ex-secretary had no manner of doubt, any more than he doubted that Mercer's scheme had been to oust him and to build his own fortunes on Atkins' ruin. He knew both Tracy and young Arnold very well by sight. When he couldn't frighten Archie into telling anything, probably he went back to his first plan of shadowing the Winter party at the Palace. He must have seen Tracy here. He penetrated his disguise. ("He's as sharp as the devil, I tell you, Colonel.") He either followed him himself or had him followed; and he heard about the telephone. ("Somebody harking in the next room, most likely.") Knowing Tracy's intimacy with Arnold, it was not hard for so clever and subtle a mind as Atkins' to jump to the conclusion and test it in the nearest telephone book. ("At least that is how I figure it out, Colonel.") Birdsall had traced the clever mechanic who was

interrogated by the eastern gentleman about to build; this man had given the lavish and inquisitive easterner a plan of the secret passages—to use in his own future residence. Whether Atkins went alone or in company to the Casa Fuerte the detective could only surmise. He couldn't tell whether his object would be mere blackmail, or robbery of the cipher, or assassination. Perhaps he found the insensible man in the patio and was tempted by the grisly opportunity; victim and weapon both absolutely to his hand; for it was established that the dagger had been shown Tracy by Mercer as a curio, and left on the stone bench.

Perhaps he had not found the dagger, but had his own means to make an end of his enemy and his own terror. Birdsall believed that he had accomplices, or at least one accomplice, with him. He conceived that they had lain in ambush watching until they saw Kito go away. Then an entry had been made. "Most like," Birdsall concluded, "he jest flung that dagger away for you folks to find and suspect the domestics, say Kito, 'cause he was away." But this was not all that Birdsall had to report. He had traced Atkins to the haunts of certain unsavory Italians; he had struck the trail, in fine. To be sure, it ran underground and was lost in the brick-walled and slimy-timbered cellars of Chinatown which harbored every sin and crime known to civilization or to savagery. What matter? By grace of his aunt's powerful friend they could track the wolves even through those noisome burrows.

"Yes," sighed the colonel, stretching out his arms, with a resonant breath of relief, "we're out of the maze; all we have to do now is to keep from being killed. Which isn't such a plain proposition in Frisco as in Massachusetts! But I reckon we can tackle it! And then—then, my darling, I shall dare be happy!"

He found himself leaning on his window sill and staring like a boy on the landscape, lost in the lovely hallucinations of moonlight. It was no scene that he knew, it was a vision of old Spain; and by and by from yonder turret the princess, with violets in her loosened hair and her soft cheek like satin and snow, would lean and look.

Y si te mueve a lastima mi eterno padece, Como te amo, amame, bellissima mujer!

"Ah, no, little girl," he muttered with a shake of the head. "I like it better to have you a plain, American gentlewoman, as Aunt Becky would say, who could send me to battle with a nice little quivery smile—sweetheart! Oh, I'm not good enough for you, my dear, my dear." He felt an immense humility as he contrasted his own lot with the loneliness of Keatcham and Mercer and the multitude of solitaires in the world, who had lost, or sadder still, had never possessed, the divine dream that is the only reality of the soul. As such thoughts moved his heart, suddenly in the full tide of hope and thankfulness, it stood still, chilled, as if by the glimpse of an iceberg in summer seas. Yet how absurd; it was only that he had recalled his stolid aunt's most unexpected touch of superstition. Quite in jest he had asked her if she felt any presentiments or queer things in her bones to-night. He expected to be answered that Janet had driven every other anxiety out of her mind; and how was she to break it to Millie?—or with some such caustic retort. Instead, she had replied testily: "Yes, I do, Bertie. I feel—horrid! I feel as if something out of the common awful were going to happen. It isn't exactly Atkins, either. Do you reckon it could be the I Suey When, that bamboo-shoots mess we had for dinner?"

Although they spent a good 20 minutes after that, joking over superstitions, and he had repeated to her some of Tracy's and Arnold's most ingenious "spooky stunts," to make the neighborhood keep its distance from Casa Fuerte, and they had laughed freely, she as heartily as he, nevertheless he divined that her smile was a pretense. Suddenly, an unruly tremor shook his own firm spirits. Looking out on the stepped and lanterned arches of the wing, he was conscious of the same tragic endowment of the darkened pile, which had oppressed him that night, weeks before, when he had stood outside on the crest of the hill; and the would-be murderers might have been skulking in the shadows of the pepper trees. He tried vainly to shake off this dispirited mood. Although he might succeed for a moment in a lover's absorption, it would come again, insidiously, seeping through his happiness like a fume. After futile attempts to sleep he rose, and still at the bidding of his uncanny and tormenting impulse he took his bath and dressed himself for the day. By this time the ashen tints of dawn were in his chamber and on the fields outside. He stood looking at the unloveliest aspect of nature, a landscape on the sunless side, before the east is red. The air felt lifeless; there were no depths in the pale sky; the azure was a flat tint, opaque and thin, like a poor water-color. While

he gazed the motionless trees, live-oaks and olives and palms, were shaken by a mighty wind; the pepper plumes tossed and streamed and tangled like a banner; the great elms along the avenue bent over in a breaking strain. Yet the silken cord of the Holland window shade did not so much as swing. There was not a wing's breath of air. But gradually the earth and cloud vibrated with a strange grinding noise which has been described a hundred times, but never adequately; a sickening creptation, as of the rocks in the hills scraping and splintering. Before the mind could question the sound, there succeeded an anarchy of uproar. In it was jumbled the crash of trees and buildings, the splintering crackle of glass, the boom of huge chimneys falling and of vast explosions, the hiss of steam, the hurrying of timbers and bricks and masses of stone or sand, and the awful rush of frantic water escaping from engine or main.

"Quake, sure's you're born!" said the colonel softly.

Now that his invisible peril was real, was upon him, his spirits leaped up to meet it. He looked coolly about him, noting in his single glance that the house was standing absolutely stanch, neither reeling nor shivering; and that the chimney just opposite his eye had not misplaced a brick. In the same instant he caught up his revolver and ran at his best pace from the room. The hall was firm under his hurrying feet. As he passed the great arched opening on the western balcony he saw an awful sight. Diagonally across from Casa Fuerte was the great house of the California magnate who did not worry his contractor with demands for colonial honesty of workmanship as well as colonial architecture. The stately mansion with its beautiful piazzas and delicate harmony of pillar and pediment, shone white and paled on the eye for a second; then rocked in ghastly wise and collapsed like a house of cards. Simultaneously a torchlike flame streamed into the air. A woeful din of human anguish pierced the inanimate tumult of wreck and crash.

"Bully for Casa Fuerte!" cried the soldier, who now was making a frenzied speed to the other side of the house. He cast a single glance toward the door which he knew belonged to Janet's room; and he thought of the boy, but he ran first to his old aunt. He didn't need to go the whole way. She came out of her door, Janet and Archie at her side. They were all perfectly calm, although in very light and semi-oriental attire. Archie plainly had just plunged out of bed. His eyes were dancing with excitement.

"This house is a dandy, ain't it, Uncle Bertie?" he exclaimed. "Mr. Arnold told me all about the way his father built it; he said it wouldn't bat its eye for an earthquake. It didn't either; but that house opposite is just kindling-wood! Say! here's Cousin Cary; and—look, Uncle Bertie, Mr. Keatcham has got up and he's all dressed. Hullo, Colvin! Don't be scared. It's only a 'quake!' Colvin grinned a sickly grin and stammered, "Yes, sir, quite so, sir." Not an earthquake could shake Colvin out of his manners.

"Are you able to do this, Mr. Keatcham?" young Arnold called breathlessly, plunging into the patio to which they had all instinctively gravitated. Keatcham laughed a short, grunting laugh. "Don't you understand, this is no little every-day 'quake! Look out! Is there a way you can look and not see a spout of flame? I've got to go downtown. Are the machines all right?"

"We must find Randall; the poor soul has a mortal terror of 'quakes—'" Aunt Rebecca's wellbred accents were untroubled; she appeared a thought stimulated, nothing more; danger always acted as tonic on Winter nerves—"Archie, you go put your clothes on this minute, honey. And I suppose we ought to look up Millicent."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Healthful Bath.
A bath much favored by the Knepists, along with the bare-foot habit, is formed from a solution of pine needles and pine cones. Cover with cold water about a pound of fresh pine needles and pine cones, broken in small pieces. Boil for half an hour, strain and add the solution to the bath. If you do not want to use the entire amount at once it can be bottled and kept for future occasions. This has a tonic effect both on the nerves and the skin. It can be used on alternate days with a bath of sea salt.

Keep Your Eyes on the Ground.
In walking about the Australian gold fields it is always advisable to keep your eyes on the ground. You can never tell when you may kick up a nugget—or fall down a deserted shaft. From Tarragulla, a district that has been very prolific in valuable nuggets, comes news of a remarkable find. A man walking across the fields picked up what he thought was a mushroom. It proved to be a nugget and contained £50 worth of gold.